Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure Spoiler-Filled Review

Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure is an original magical girl series directed by Koji Ogawa. It is produced by Toei Animation (which uses the "Izumi Todo" pen name for studio's producers as series creator), a studio founded in January 1948. It's known for over 240 anime, including *Cutie Honey*, *Dragon Ball*, *Sailor Moon*, *Smile PreCure!*, and *Sailor Moon Crystal*. Ryunosuke Kingetsu is the show's head writer. As a warning, this review will discuss murder, death, trauma, attempted murder, psychological manipulation, and other mature themes.

This series has an intriguing story. A girl named Sora Harewataru (voiced by Arkia Sekine) travels to Skyland's main city to watch the birthday of Ellee, the Kingdom's only princess. In an effort to escape her captors from the Underg Empire, she and Ellee (voiced by Aoi Koga) end up in Sorashido City, within Japan. While there, she comes across Mashiro Nijigaoka (voiced by Ai Kakuma). Later on, she meets Mashiro's grandmother, Yoyo (voiced by Tomoko Shiota), a non-human animal named Tsubasa Yuunagi (voiced by Ayumu Murase) which can transform into a Puni bird, and a young adult woman named Ageha Hijiri (voiced by Ayaka Nanase). All of them work together to stop the Underg Empire's evil deeds, and planned kidnapping of Ellee, even if it puts their lives into jeopardy.

Originally, I hadn't planned to review this series. The series isn't as environmentally focused as *Tokyo Mew Mew New*, nor a dark fantasy like *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*, a comedy such as *Tweeny Witches*, or a magical fantasy like *Little Witch Academia*. I changed my mind after reading an Anime

News Network chat-log stating that the series "breaks the mold" by introducing the first boy in the *Pretty Cure* franchise, and an *Anime Feminist* article by Cy Catwell, which described the series as enjoyable, upbeat, feminine-targeted, and "incredibly empowering."

Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure is more than a magical girl series where Sora transforms into Cure Sky, Mashiro into Cure Prism, and Tsubasa into Cure Wing. Sora has some of the strongest character development of any character in the entire series. She goes from someone who claims she is a hero to the reality, with many bumps around the way. She is only rivaled by what Tsubasa goes through, who is a species of bird, and can't fly, causing his fellow bird peers to make fun of him.

Like other magical girl series, there is yuri subtext, specifically between Sora and Mashiro. In fact, both of them have a combo attack against any Ranborgs summoned by Kabaton (voiced by Yasuhro Mamiya), a general of the Underg Empire. As the series goes forward, their connection with one another gets stronger. It interlinks with camaraderie between the PreCures. For instance, Sora and Mashiro reassure Tsubase, increasing his self-confidence, helping him face his fears and insecurities.

One of the more interesting twists is the reveal that the grandmother of Mashiro, Yoyo, is from Skyland. She helps out the protagonists by connecting a magic mirror back to Skyland, and later, an inter-dimensional tunnel, with the right materials. She is a wise, guiding force, for the characters, and is often aware of more than what she reveals.

While *Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure* has characteristics typical in the magical girl genre, including transformations, friendship, heroic elements, youth, and femininity, this series is more than that. There are no heterosexual relationships. Rather, there's the aforementioned yuri subtext and a focus on friendship, with the creation of a found/chosen family among the protagonists. Unlike *Sailor Moon*, two characters buck the idea of the PreCures as princesses: Sora and Tsubasa. Both appear to be more down-and-out fighters, not royalty. Mashiro is the closest to being a princess-like apart from Ellee (an actual Princess).

Uniquely, Sora sees one of the key generals in Skyland, Captain Shalala (voiced by Saiga Mitsuki), as her rolemodel-of-sorts, rather than a king or prince. Just as significant is the fact Tsubasa is a part of the team, showing that the magic-based and gentle power of magical girls isn't just for girls. Instead it makes clear that men can fight without punching or having lots of physical training. In fact, the latter is done by Sora but not anyone else.

There's some parallels between Tsubasa and Steven Universe, in that both do things seen as "girly" and "feminine." However, the latter develops it more than the former. Steven uses his mother's

shield (with a rose in the center), his power for self-defense, rather than offense, and often cries, to name a few elements. Despite these differences, Tsubasa is a relatively well-developed character, as much as any other protagonist in this series.

(watch on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1YNZYEM8sY)

Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure is more than a series focused on heroism, which uses sky as a main motif and features characters with their own signature power moves. For one, it is novel that Sora spares Kabaton life after he fails his Earth mission for the Underg Empire. As a result, he lives a new non-evil life in Sorashido City.

Sora is just as compelling. She makes up with a fellow guard that she trains alongside in Skyland, showing she has become more of a hero. She wants to fight evil and cares about those around her. Of course, this is not unique to Sora. Other protagonists act similarly, including those in other magical girl series. For instance, the Sailor Scouts in *Sailor Moon* often go out of their way to protect others, especially if those people are near and dear to them.

Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure shares the message that any obstacle can be overcome, even if it seems insurmountable. Something similar is communicated in *Ippon Again!*, except the latter series primarily states that hard work can lead to good results. The former is different, as it is more about the

value of teamwork and friendship. Of course, this is present in *Ippon Again!*, but fights are more one-on-one, while those in *Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure* often feature multiple heroes fighting at once.

The Skyland arc is one of the more gripping plotlines. Sora becomes a member of the Azure Guards and fights against the villainous Battamonda (voiced by KENN / Ken'ichirō Ōhashi), along with other defenders of the city. This arc indicates that near-impossible challenges can be met. Mashiro and Sora use all of their magical girl energy to stop a bomb from destroying the capital of Skyland. This two-episode arc is short-lived. It ends in the fifteenth episode, setting the stage for a return to Sorashido City. The King and Queen are incapacitated by a curse-of-sorts. Captain Shala presumably sacrifices herself to save the city.

In the next two episodes are some of the series' strongest. This arc features protagonists returning to Japan and the grandmother, Yoyo, finding a way to heal the King and Queen. They work together to cheer up Elle and Battamonda follows them, declaring he will stop them no matter what. As was the case in episodes before this, there are huge battles, but everything is always rebuilt afterward. There is also a nice bonding scene, in another episode, between Sora and Mashiro during a relay race, bringing them closer together.

There was some controversy about the sixteenth episode of *Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure*. Some claimed that one of the banners used had a Japanese imperialist origin. Whether that is the case or not, it pales in comparison to what happened with *Oshi No Ko* (which is returning with a second season this year). There were even complaints about a subset of that series fandom harassing the mother of professional wrestler Hana Kimura. She previously said that she doesn't want to blame anyone and praised the series for raising "important issues" but wondered if anyone gave it "the proper consideration before releasing it out into the world."

Apart from that, the camaraderie between the characters, the aforementioned yuri subtext between Sora and Mashiro, and the value of self-love are important series themes. When the heroes are pinned down, they use all the strength they can to beat the villains, even if they are facing stronger monsters. This is the case in the eighteenth and nineteenth episodes. In those episodes, Ageha Hijiri goes from being an 18-year-old woman who teaches at a nursery school to a magical girl named Cure Butterfly. She becomes an integral part of the PreCure team. The new opening in the nineteenth episode features her in a much more prominent place.

One of the best parts of the eighteenth and nineteenth episodes of *Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure* is the fact that Ageha is not some refugee from a magical land (as is the case for Sora and Tsubasa). She's

an ordinary person in more ways than one. Having a character who is passionate about primary school education is great. Many magical girls are teenagers, so they aren't necessarily thinking of their future careers. That sets Ageha apart.

Surely, Mashiro is also an "ordinary person," but Ageha is different. She cares about the students of her nursery class. She defends them, and the school, after she transforms into Cure Butterfly. By the nineteenth episode, she has settled in with everyone. She even works with Tsubasa, who's worried about her, to develop a joint attack named "PreCure! Titanic Rainbow." This magic spell involves one person using a paintbrush, turning a being into rainbow, and then using it against an enemy, if I understand it correctly. Basically, it is "death by bird butt," to put it simply. It's even more powerful than Mashiro and Sora's joint spell, named "Updraft Shining."

Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure harps on a theme expressed in episodes of *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur*, *Cleopatra in Space*, and in *I've Been Killing Slimes for 300 Years and Maxed Out My Level*. Viewers are told that overwork is bad and that breaks are good. This series goes even further: it makes clear that no one should take on everything by themselves, but should share the burden with others. By the end of the nineteenth episode, Tsubasa, Mashiro, Sora, and Ageha all divide up the house duties, embodying elements of a cooperative housing situation.

(watch on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yiSY_mOBE4)

Ageha's overwork and over-dedication are the result of her determination to give back to everyone. The series depicts the former as something people shouldn't not strive for. Fitting with the anti-overwork message, collaboration is emphasized. This is not unique to this series. It is present in many magical girl and superhero series, especially when characters in those series are part of a team. Coming back to Ageha, I am reminded of the twenty-eighth episode. In that episode, it's revealed that Ageha knows a well-known model (Maria Saotome), and a well-known model and designer (Kaguya Saotome). Both are her sisters. A divorce separated them and they took different paths. The episode ends with each sister agreeing to do their best and bring a smile to faces of other people, whether in the fashion world or within the classroom.

Ageha isn't the only one who struggles in *Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure*. Throughout the series, Mashiro often works on picture book illustration and writing. In the twentieth episode, she has writer's

bloc and is unable to come up with a "good" original story. She believes she is borrowing from too many other stories. A mother reading to their daughter inspires her. Although there is an obligatory fight scene in this episode, with a monster summoned by an annoyed Battamonda, she still submits her drawing in time for the town's picture book contest. Even though she doesn't win, she dedicates herself to drawing again, which comes up later in the series.

Otherwise, some characters use their knowledge to assist their fellow team members. In the twenty-first episode, Tsubasa defeats Battamonda's summoned monster because he knows that clouds are made of "tiny bits of water and ice." He is helped by the other PreCures, who use their magical attacks, including a joint attack with Ageha. At the episode's end, Yoyo gives him a book and Mirror Pad to help him learn more. In a later episode, Tsubasa connects with Shoko Amauno who knows about airplanes and flying. He uses it to help defeat the summoned monster. The former episode made me think back to a middle school science class I look which included a lesson about different cloud types. I probably still have the handouts from that class!

One of the most heartbreaking *Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure* episodes follows. Battamonda tricks Sora. He claims that she planted the dark hatred in his heart. Captain Shalala is inside the monster he summoned. He manipulates the monster to attack her. Other PreCures save her, but don't purify the monster after he claims that Undergu energy is keeping her alive. The monster-of-sorts, and Battamonda, disappear. He declares he will continue to play with them until their hearts are "in pieces." The latter happens with Sora. After she says she "doesn't want to fight anymore," her mirage pen disappears, so she can't transform! In this way, Battamonda is one of the worst villains in the entire series. He engaged in psychological warfare against Sora because he tried to make her feel afraid / hopeless / less confident without physically hurting her.

The twenty-third episode brings this full circle. Sora returns to Skyland, believing she has lost everything, since she can't access her powers. While her parents respect her decision, her brother does not. Her friends are worried about her. Yoyo says that she doesn't know how people move forward when their dreams are shattered. Her friends Ageha and Tsubasa are unable to get her out of her funk. Instead, she thinks about the good times she had with Mashiro and that running away isn't what a hero does. While reading Mashiro's letter, and blushing, a new mirage pen appears (a product of her feelings for Mashiro?). Her father tells her that a dream isn't a one-time thing, but can come back repeatedly. Almost like Superman descending from the sky, she comes back with force, and does an amazing Sky Punch.

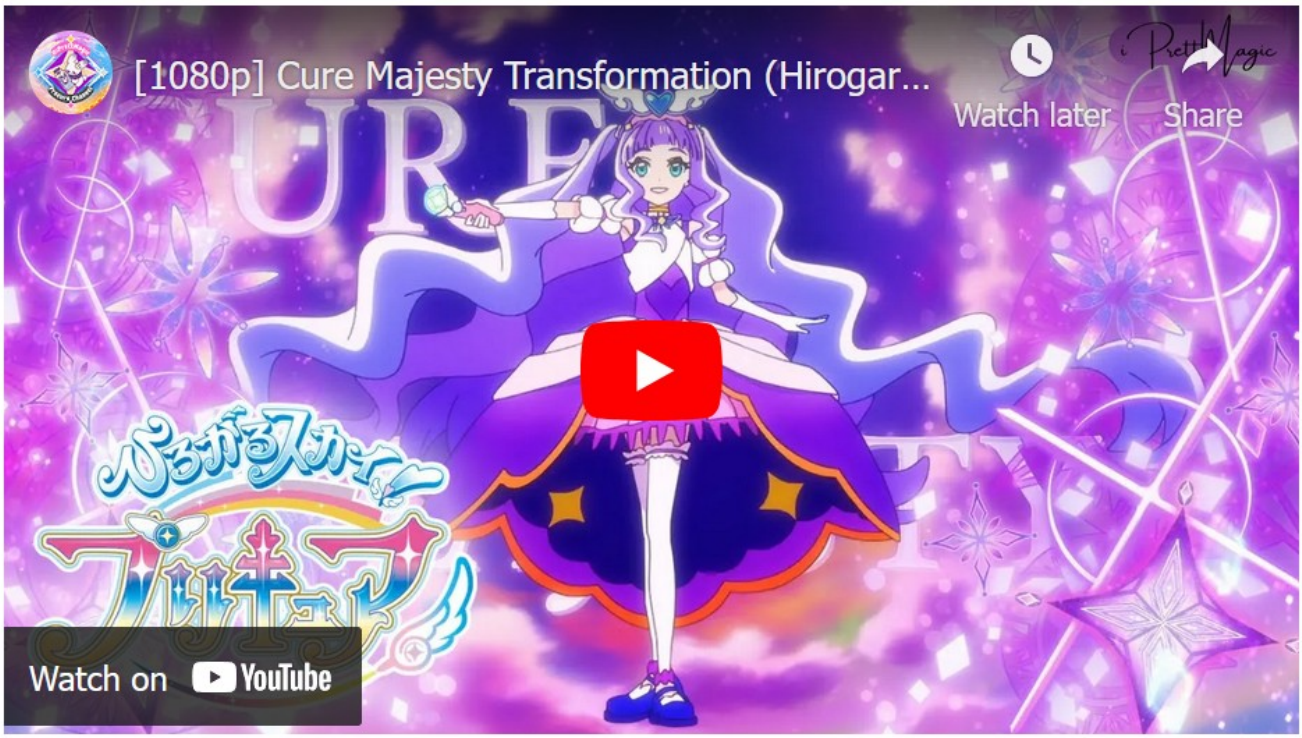
Unsurprisingly, Battamonda is annoyed. The Mirror Pad collects the right amount of energy before their purification. After Sora does her combo attack with Mashiro, known as PreCure! Updraft Shining, the Captain is released from the monster-of-sorts. She is weak and recovers. The yuri subtext here is strong. Sora and Mashiro hug one another, with Mashiro calling Sora a "hero girl." Mashiro gives Sora back her hero journal. Sora says she will get stronger so that Battamonda, who's on the run, won't hurt her anymore. After this high-stakes action, it is no surprise that they somewhat relax in the next episode after healing the King and Queen with the potion they have collected, and become famous in Skyland.

Ellee is ominously described as a "child of destiny." She appeared out of nowhere, then the King and Queen adopted her. Ageha predicts, in the twenty-fifth episode of *Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure*, that Ellee will get her own magical powers. They first manifest themselves in her being able to talk to animals. These powers come in handy when fighting a monster summoned by Minoton, another villain of the week, as you could call them. This comes up again in the twenty-ninth episode. Ellee bonds with a stuffed animal, in contrast to Sora, who's terrified out of her mind (she dislikes the animal as it is kowai rather than kawaii), until she learns the animal can talk because it is magic.

This mixes with episodes which have comedic moments or lessons. At the end of the twenty-sixth episode, Mashiro's parents arrive and spend time at the cooperative house-of-sorts she is living in. They have "I Love Mashiro" shirts with them. This embarrasses her, but they only stay a short time before flying back overseas. In another episode, all the PreCures are pulled inside the mirror pad. After Ellee accidentally activates "hidden wild lessons" mode, they go through lessons of sorts. Somehow, they get back just in time for the fireworks. The "obligatory" beach episode, episode thirty, is a bit laid-back. Even so, it includes scary parts: Sora almost drowns while fighting Minoton's summoned monster. In the end, they all have fun time and eat a meal at a beach restaurant.

This series never criticizes the beauty myth or beauty industry. On the other hand, Ageha could have been a model like her sisters, but chooses to be a nursery school teacher. As such, this series bucks the usual storyline, where she would become a model. It echoes how Fuuka Miyazawa, protagonist of the *The Aquatope on the White Sand*, chooses to leave her idol life behind and work at an aquarium in Okinawa. At the same time, *Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure* is less girly than *Tropical-Rouge! Pretty Cure*, which is much more centered on makeup. The focus on makeup being part of magical transformation is not new, but its central to this franchise.

The thirty-ninth episode is a turning point. It marks the introduction of Skearhead (voiced by Mitsuru Miyamoto). He claims to be ruler of the Undergu Empire, working on behalf of Empress Underg (voiced by Takako Honda). He kidnaps Ellee, to the shock of her friends, but, somehow, she escapes and new PreCure emerges: Cure Majesty. She saves her friends. He withdraws, saying he will remember the name "Cure Majesty." They all are glad that Ellee is ok. In the end, Sora resolves they need to get stronger to defend Ellee from new enemies. This mixes with superb animation throughout, which is often rad and tip-top.



(watch on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glpNPOiCxlQ)

In the next few *Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure* episodes, Ellee comes into her own. The fact she is Cure Majesty becomes apparent, even though she can't transform at will at first. Skearhead tries to eliminate her, with Minoton reborn with Undergu energy. He wants all the PreCures to disappear. Whether she gives off vibes from the beginning of *Steven Universe* or not, her friends are more than happy to help her, as the first toddler PreCure in the franchise. Aoi Koga does a great job voicing all her iterations! Coming back to the character, she leads the way to an ancient ruins where they come across the *Majestic Chroniclon*, giving them all a super saiyan power boost, and they beat back the dark energy.

Mashiro attempts again to become a picture book author in the thirty-fourth episode. Battamonda, living in the human world as "Monda," in a terrible apartment, next door to Kabaton, tries to "discourage" Mashiro. He claims he is an art student and tries to gain her confidence. However, this does the exact opposite. Mashiro felt down after reading her story at the local library and some kids called it "boring." Later, she thanks him for his words and which surprised him. This was the first time someone cheered him on. At the same time, Skearhead makes more appearances, even as the heroes beat him back with the *Majestic Chroniclon*'s powers.

Episode thirty-five is one better *Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure* episodes. It centers around Tamaki Shinomiya, a student who also attends Sorashida Academy. She requests Sora be their special coach. Tamaki is injured and can't throw before the next tournament. This puts the team in jeopardy because she's their ace. This episode isn't notable because Skearhead appears, Tamaki learning that Sora is a PreCure, Sora carrying Tamaki in a bridal carry, nor a baseball pitch defeating a conjured monster. Rather, Sora finds a friend who connects with her, even though she isn't a hero with magical powers. Secondly, the episode realistically shows the time of Tamaki's recovery. As a side note, the baseball club loves Sora. The yuri subtext is as strong as when people cheered for Marika Kato when she entered the academy in an episode of *Bodacious Space Pirates*.

Skearhead gets more dangerous, threatening kids in a nursery school in the thirty-sixth episode. He arrogantly declares, in the episode afterward, that only he needs to know why he is targeting the PreCures. In the process, Tsubasa and Ageha fight alongside one another. Ageha cheers up a sad kid (Takeru) who wants to stay at nursery school. She meets the nursery school teacher who gave her confidence all those years ago. That teacher happens to be Takeru's mother! Ageha and Mashiro also reflect on when their friendship began. They learn that their favorite tree was chopped down and made into a swing that everyone can use. In the second of these two episodes, the monster fight seems unnecessary and obligatory. This is an issue with some, but not all, episodes in this series.

The PreCures continue to take risks. They meet a "flightless" dragon tribe with Tsubasa's help, while Skearhead harasses them, even turning a bell into a monster. In the latter case, Ellee watches a television special about weddings with Aegeha, Sora, and Mashiro. Afterward, she's determined to marry Tsubasa. While he agrees to "play wedding" with her, Ellee is serious about it, and Tsubasa has a nightmare about the marriage. She even holds his book hostage in response and declares she hates him. The episode ends positively. Tsubasa vows to be Ellee's knight and protect her forever. She sees the other PreCures as her friends forever. She doesn't think she is married to anyone. This makes clear that

the "marriage" was only a method to ensure she would be friends with Tsubasa forever. On some level, this episode shows the problems with child marriages.

Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure's forty-first episode shakes everything apart. It begins with Mashiro struggling to come up with a theme for a writing contest. Monda acts nice, claiming that power is only for the ones who succeed. She tries to cheer him up and says she likes fallen leaves. Later, Skearhead calls Monda worthless, saying he doesn't deserve to exist, and she defends him. But she is not the one shaken: rather it is Sora. She confronts Skearhead who says the "one they love" wants them to attack the PreCures. She isn't sure what he means. While Monda's words about fallen leaves echo in his mind while the words of Skearhead echo in hers.

This leads to the next episode. Tsubasa researches how to generate a specific type of energy, specifically having in mind a protective shield around Skyland (this foreshadows what happens in a later episode). Sora begins to have feelings of self-doubt. She puts on a strong front to the Captain, but wants to figure out these feelings by herself. Her friends say they will be there for her, supporting her where necessary. It's revealed that Skearhead knows about Tsubasa's research, implying there is a mole providing information to him. Sora continues to hesitate to fight. This clears up when she talks to Skearhead, explaining why she stopped fighting, saying that PreCures are fighting on behalf of the "one they love."

Skearhead retreats but is unfazed. Typically, he declares that "thinking and worrying creates self-doubt in battle" and threatens to destroy the city. In response, she asks if he ever hesitates or worries when he is fighting for someone. She demands an answer from him as to why he is hurting others and making everyone suffer. He says she doesn't need to know why. Instead, in his mind, she needs to "disappear." He calls her naive, saying her beliefs will result in the city's destruction. Sora doesn't give up. She doesn't care if she is naive. She uses her Sky Punch to purify the energy he's gathered. Before he can talk, he's shaken by her power and cowardly flees. Sora later tells her friends what he told her. She remains committed to learning why he is hurting people.

These serious *Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure* episodes are mixed with fun ones, like the Halloween-themed thirty-ninth episode. Battamonda dresses up as "Cure Pumpkin" and claims he is a PreCure. He wants to make the PreCures look bad, but his plan is an utter failure. He runs away, ashamed and apologized, while all the PreCures get candy. In some ways, the episode sets the stage for the forty-third one. In that episode, Monda agrees with Mashiro, who tells him that she decides her own worth. He attacks Skearhead, who believes that those without power are "worthless."

In addition, he gives Mashiro back her transformer-pen. She is able to, with help of her fellow PreCures, fight back against Monda. He was turned into a monster-of-sorts by Skearhead. Although they almost lose, Mashiro uses one of her spells to make Monda's heart "shine." A combo attack by the PreCures allows them to purify him. He is forgiven by Sora. He apologizes to Mashiro for ripping her notebook. It almost seems he is on the road to becoming a better person/being.

(watch on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfQe4t9DuuY)

In the series final arc, more about the "far past" comes to the forefront. Empress Underg tells the PreCures, in the forty-fourth episode, that the Skyland castle was built on "tears of sadness." She wants revenge for what happened in the past. In an almost *Steven Universe*-esque manner, Sora proposes they talk with her, but she challenges them instead. Their massive attack fails. Their strength is no match for her, and they fall down, transforming back into their usual selves. The Empress blames everything on Ellee, who is shocked to hear this slander. In response, she freezes time thanks to the *Majestic Chroniclon.*

Ellee, Sora, and Mashiro travel back three hundred years into the past. They meet Princess Elleelain of Skyland. Sora and Mashiro are unable to transform. They do what they can to fight the Ramborgs. Sora remembers the classic stories. As the Empress declares, fighting only brings tears. This episode of *Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure* makes one thing clear: Ellee is the reincarnation of Cure Noble.

This is continued in the forty-fifth episode. Cheer Noble is cheered on, condemning the Emperor of the Underg Empire for attacking against defenseless Puni birds. The Empress, a being born from the sea of Undergu energy, says that strength isn't "everything," standing against Skearhead's conceptions.

What I found fascinating is that the male characters are the ones who promote the idea that strength is "everything." This is one of the feminist messages of this series. Even the Empress tries to stop the fighting, but her father won't listen. Her effort is successful and supported by Cure Noble (who says that fighting brings only tears), and the present-day PreCures (Sora, Mashiro, and Ellee). This is scuttled by Skearhead. He uses the meeting between Cure Noble, the Empress, and Emperor of Underg Empire as a trap/distraction to attack the city. Rightly enraged, Cure Noble goes on the attack and accidentally hurts the Empress. Even so, they achieve peace, but Skearhead is unhappy.

These events have reverberations in the present: the Empress is hardened and refuses to consider peace. Instead, she plans to wipe them out. The PreCures beat her. Skearhead whisks her away before they have a chance to talk to her. This plotline is interrupted by the forty-sixth *Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure* episode. It centers around ways to cheer-up everyone in Skyland's main city. They have a celebration which resembles Christmas. That episode is one of the only ones without a villain battle. It includes nice Sora/Mashiro moments, with both pledging to protect the world together.

The audience learns about what really happened at the same time as the PreCures. This includes the revelation, in episode forty-seven, that Ellee is a manifestation of Morning Star, otherwise known as Princess Ellee-Lain. She tells them that she put her power in the *Majestic Chroniclon.* She informs them that good relations between Skyland and the Underg Empire suddenly ended, without warning. Fading away, she tells them that the world's fate is in their hands. Hilariously, while Ellee remains as a teenage girl most of the time, she goes back to becoming a little kid when she gets hungry.

Skearhead is crafty. He claims that he would lay down his life for the Empress. On the other hand, he traps two PreCures in a bubble. He intends on draining their power and attacking the city. Skearhead disappears into nothingness after Ellee (as Cure Majesty) attacks him. He claims this is his "last lesson" to the Empress. Understandably, she is horrified. Sora tells her the truth: if she had talked to them, it wouldn't have come to this. The Empress claims that Cure Noble attacked her father and ended the relations between her country in Skyland. Conveniently, Skearhead isn't there, so no one can get to the truth and question her story's validity.

The story that the Empress tells gives the audience a window into her perspective. She believes that Skearhead saved her and says she has lost everything. She claims she has nothing left due to the

reported "death" of Skearhead at Ellee's hand. Echoing Cassandra's wildly-powerful moonstone powers in *Rapunzel's Tangled Adventure*, she calls forth all the Undergu energy, and tries to destroy the entire city. The PreCures do what they can to stop her. Some citizens are evacuated. Even former villains, like Kabaton, Minoton, and Battamonda, reappear. They are now on the side of the PreCures.

At first, it seems like the PreCures have made a breakthrough. She goes back to her normal form after they tell her that strength isn't everything. Mashiro and Sora do their PreCure Updraft Shining combo attack to purify her. Before she can say anything, Skearhead, like a unhinged groundhog, pops out of nowhere. He stabs her through the body with a spear. This action is either attempted reginicide [killing of a queen] or, more specifically, attempted tyrannicide since the Empress is effectively a tyrant.

Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure's penultimate episode raises the stakes. Like a light bulb flickering on in a dark closet, the Empress remembers something she'd forgotten: Skearhead killed her father. He replaced her actual memory with a false one. To cover his tracks, he created the memory that Cure Noble betrayed her. This ensured that her body and mind would be tied to Undergu energy. He reveals his true form to the PreCures: an incarnation of Undergu energy named Darkhead. He psychologically damages the Empress even more, declaring that he doesn't love her at all. This causes her to realize that everything she believed has been a lie. This is all part of the series' feminist themes.

This all leads to one of the best series sequences. The PreCures travel to the Underg Empire to save the Empress. Along the way, PreCures continue peeling off to fight the Ramborgs. By the end, only Sora and Mashiro are left. They confront Darkhead who only saw the Empress as an effective "vessel" believing that a "hero's light" was inside her. He sees Sora as a better vessel. He uses the sea of Undergu energy to turn her into Dark Sky! While this energy flow is poisonous to PreCures, she fights him regardless. Through her determination, she beats him, with the help of Mashiro. She is able to purge him from her body permanently.

Welcome back, Cure Sky. Hirogaru Sky! Precure Episode 49

Watch on: https://web.archive.org/web/20240314012046/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONd0VK-IrkU

Although Skearhead / Darkhead is gone (in a sense) and the Empress is healed, as a side effect, their battle is not over. Before they begin, they bond with the Empress. Sora defines a hero for her: a person fighting no matter what stands in their way and believing that your convictions are right. She admits that she isn't great or naive enough to call herself a hero. Her friends have always supported her. The PreCures prepare themselves to fight, and win against, an evil snake beast known as Daijurg (another form of Skearhead / Darkhead).

In the *Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure* series finale, the Empress rejects Daijurg/Darkhead/Skearhead. They all de-transform since they have been transformed too long. Sora raises their spirits, declaring that the ability to be a PreCure is infinite, and inside them. In effect, she says that everyone has infinite possibility. Somehow, they are able to defeat the snake monster on Earth and purify it. Everything ends happily. The Empress declares that they will have a lasting peace in Skyland. Kabaton, Minoton, and Battamonda join her.

A fissure appears: Ellee, Tsubasa and Sora prepare to go back to their world (Skyland). Mashiro stays behind on Earth. They say their goodbyes. The most emotional moment is between Mashiro and Sora. She even jokes about how many times they held hands and says she loves Mashiro's smile. In

response, Mashiro calls her cool and strong. This break doesn't last long. The next morning, Ellee, Tsubasa, and Sora come back so they can eat breakfast together. The series ends with Mashiro making a picture book featuring all of them, and herself. It's akin to Rapunzel's journal in *Tangled*. In a post-credits scene, Cure Wonderful, from the currently airing Pretty Cure series, *Wonderful PreCure!*, makes her debut.

This series is better than the decent adult PreCure, entitled *Power of Hope: PreCure Full Bloom*, a clear nostalgia trip. Its longer than *Delicious Party Pretty Cure*, the previous series in the Pretty Cure / PreCure franchise. That series had forty-five episodes. After this series ended, *Wonderful PreCure!* replaced it in the same time slot on All-Nippon News Network. *Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure* could have been longer. In a weird and unfortunate coincidence, *Rapunzel's Tangled Adventure* had more episodes, including the film as one episode. That is despite the fact that final season had its final series order cut from thirty-six episodes down to twenty-one, resulting in a total episode count of sixty.

If the series received another ten episodes, it could have involved a corrupted Cure Sky becoming Dark Sky as a cliffhanger, possibly turning against her fellow PreCures. She could become a fallen magical girl of sorts. The latter led to fanart of Dark Sky and Cure Prism together, sometimes in very compromising positions. In the series, as it stands presently, the day is saved, arguably, by lesbian love between Sora and Mashiro. Additional episodes could have canonized this yuri subtext. To my knowledge, there aren't any canon lesbian characters in the PreCure franchise. There's only subtext which fans recognize from time to time.

Whether there is wasted potential or not, the writers clearly wanted to quickly wrap up the series. This allowed the series to set the stage for *Wonderful PreCure!*, the next PreCure series. Although I enjoyed the series conclusion, since it tied up loose ends, I don't understand why all the PreCures couldn't have lived together in the human world. Perhaps some fanfiction writers will imagine these possibilities, and others, adding to the over 180 fics for the series on AO3.

The show's crew and cast are talented. Series director Koji Ogawa worked on other Pretty Cure and magical girl series, along with *Chaos Dragon* and *Dragon Ball Super*. Ryunosuke Kingetsu was head writer for *Ninja Nonsense* and *Futakoi Alternative* and a writer on *Märchen Mädchen*. Series character designer Atsushi Saitō, worked on *Clannad*, *Gargantia on the Verdurous Planet*, *Healer Girl*, *Is the Order a Rabbit?*, *K-On!*, and *Love Live! Superstar!!*. The fact that I enjoyed watching most of these aforementioned series made me like this series more.

Voice actors for the show's four protagonists are just as experienced. Akira Sekine voiced Princess Charlotte, a protagonist of *Princess Principal*, along with characters in *Asobi Asobase*, *Assault Lily Bouquet*, *Akebi's Sailor Uniform*, and *Birdie Wing*. Ai Kakuma voiced Hazuki Kudo in *Kubo Won't Let Me Be Invisible*, Ilia Coral in *The Magical Revolution of the Reincarnated Princess and the Genius Young Lady*, and Natsu Umehara in *Ippon Again!*. She will voice Kaori Tachibana in *Whisper Me a Love Song* in April and Yuri Shibasaki in *The Masterful Cat Is Depressed Again Today* in July.

Ayumu Murase and Ayaka Nanase, who voice two other protagonists, are also seasoned voice actors. Murase voices Kento Yamada in *Skip and Loafer* and Hachi in *My Roommate is a Cat*. Nanase voices Mary Read in *Fena: Pirate Princess* and Noa Shiragiku in *Tsurune*. *Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure* voice actors Aoi Koga, Tomoko Shiota, Yasuhro Mamiya, and Saiga Mitsuki are known for their roles in *Kaguya-sama: Love Is War*, *The Demon Girl Next Door*, *Asteroid in Love*, *Princess Principal: Crown Handler*, *Yurikuma Arashi*, *Ouran High School Host Club*, *Maria Watches Over Us*, *Spy × Family*, and *Stars Align*.

Soaring Sky! Pretty Cure can be streamed on Crunchyroll, and, hopefully has a DVD or Blu-ray physical release in the U.S.

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